

## TEEN TRAVEL - HEALTH AND SAFETY

So you have planned that all-important trip. You have made your plans and you have bought your tickets. You're all set, right? Wrong – there are three things you need to know about before you go on your great trip; whether it is just going across the country or if you are going around the world. What is it that you need to know? Well that is how to be healthy enough to take the trip, how to be healthy during your trip and then how to be safe while you are there.

The first section will focus on health. There are certain things that you need to do before you leave home and there are certain things you need to be aware of and do when you arrive. The last thing you want is to be either too sick to make the trip or be able to enjoy it once you arrive.

### Making Sure You are Healthy Enough to Take Your Trip

This may be just a cartoon but it is a serious issue when you are planning a trip. The last thing that you want when you are travelling is to come down with a cold or worse a serious infection when you are just days away from going on Spring Break, a family trip, or your eagerly anticipated trip overseas.



With their vacation in Hawaii coming up, Carol was taking no chances on someone getting sick.

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Just like your parents would take the car into the shop and give it a tune up before you went on a summer road trip, you need to make sure you are healthy enough to go on your trip. How do you do that? The first step is to identify where you are going on your trip. Are you likely to need immunizations? Don't believe for a minute that just because you are going across Canada or into the United States that there are no health issues that you need to be aware of.

Even in Canada, the following immunizations are recommended for all citizens:

<sup>4</sup> McPherson, John. "Close to Home." *Calgary Sun Online*.  
<<http://www.canoe.ca/PlanetSun/canoecomics.html>> (03-10-2005).

- **Diphtheria:** an acute bacterial infection of the throat, nose and tonsils, resulting in lesions in the infected area. In severe cases, it can cause swelling and fluid build-up in the neck. Diphtheria can also infect the skin, causing lesions similar to impetigo. In Canada, a diphtheria booster shot is recommended every 10 years. All travellers should have up-to-date diphtheria shots prior to travel.
- **Hepatitis B:** a viral disease affecting the liver. Usually more serious than Hepatitis A, its symptoms include gradual development of fever, loss of appetite, abdominal discomfort, nausea and vomiting, joint pain, rash and frequently progresses to jaundice. Its severity also varies, but a greater percentage of cases will involve destruction of the liver cells resulting in liver failure and death. Unlike Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B is transmitted through contact with infected blood and other body fluids. Any traveller who will be staying in an area with widespread Hepatitis B for longer than 6 months, or who is doing medical work, or who is likely to have contact with blood or sexual contact with residents of such areas, should be immunized with Hepatitis B vaccine.
- **Measles:** an acute highly infectious disease caused by a virus. A fever usually develops before the symptoms which include inflammation of the tissue around the eyes, inflammation of the nasal tissues with severe runny nose, cough and red blotchy rash on the skin.
- **Poliomyelitis:** commonly called polio, is a disease caused by a virus. It can vary in severity from a mild illness with fever, to an inflammation of the lining of the brain, to paralysis and sometimes death. Most residents of Canada are already vaccinated against polio; however, if you have not been vaccinated before, or if you have not had a booster shot in the past 10 years, you may require polio vaccine before you travel. Outbreaks of polio can occur in many countries, especially those without national vaccination programs.
- **Rubella:** also known as German measles is usually a mild illness caused by a virus. Its symptoms include fever, headache, malaise, inflammation of the tissues around the eyes and a widespread rash. Rubella can cause serious birth defects in an unborn child should the mother be infected during pregnancy. All children and women of childbearing age, who have never had rubella or have not been previously vaccinated, should be given a rubella vaccine prior to travel.
- **Tetanus:** also known as lockjaw is caused by a toxin produced by the tetanus bacteria. This bacterium, found usually in the soil, infects an open wound or cut and begins to produce toxin. The toxin causes painful muscle contractions usually in the face and neck muscles. If untreated, the contractions can restrict breathing, causing death. In Canada, a tetanus booster shot is recommended every 10 years. All travellers should have up-to-date tetanus shots prior to travel.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada.  
Immunizations Recommended for Travel  
 Outside of Canada. Canada: Federal  
 Government of Canada, 1999.  
 < [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-  
 pmv/236\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/236_e.html) >

Whether you are going on a trip with your parents or by yourself, you should check with your parents to see if your immunizations are up to date. They should have your medical records. If not then check with your doctor and find out whether your immunizations are up to date. All of this information should be on file.

## OVERSEAS

If you are heading overseas or outside of North America then you need to visit a doctor in order to find out what immunizations or medications that you need to have prior to your trip. These questions are common for most people visiting a doctor prior to a trip:

1. *When should I go to my doctor?* You should go to your doctor **six to eight** weeks before your departure date. Some immunizations are in fact a series of treatments that will require several visits.
2. *What immunizations or medications will I have to have?* Well that will depend on where you are going. Your doctor will proscribe a series of treatments based on your country of destination, your height, weight and age, as well as any previous medical conditions that you may have. That is why it is best to go to your regular family doctor since he/she will know your medical history best.
3. *What if I don't have a regular family doctor?* If you don't have a regular family doctor that is ok. You can visit a travel health clinic and they will know the right treatment to prescribe. If you do not know where a travel health clinic is you can go to your local campus medical centre or nearest walk-in clinic and they can refer you to the travel health clinic.

The following is a list of the most common medical issues requiring immunization for travellers heading outside of North America. This applies for Mexico, Central and South America as well International Destinations:

- **European tick borne** is a viral disease resembling other encephalitides transmitted by mosquito bite. This disease is transmitted by tick bites and has a longer duration of symptoms. Vaccination is recommended for long-term travellers to areas where this disease is widespread, specifically areas of Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union as well as parts of Europe during April through August.
- **Hepatitis A** is a viral disease affecting the liver. The symptoms include abrupt fever, malaise, and loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal discomfort, followed by jaundice (yellowing of skin colour). Hepatitis A varies in severity and duration of the illness. In rare cases it can cause fatal liver damage. Protection against Hepatitis A through immunization with Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for travellers to developing countries, especially rural areas, or areas where the hygienic quality of food and water supply is likely to be poor, or areas where Hepatitis A is widespread.

- **Japanese encephalitis (JE)** is caused by a virus transmitted by mosquito bite. It causes an acute inflammation of the brain, spinal cord and the membranes surrounding them which can result in high fever, headache, disorientation, tremors, convulsions occasionally and coma. This disease occurs throughout most of East Asia from India east to Korea and Japan during the late summer and early fall. It also occurs sporadically throughout the year in tropical areas of Southeast Asia including Thailand. Vaccination is recommended for travel to any area prone to JE for more than 4 weeks.
- **Meningococcal meningitis** is an acute bacterial infection resulting in the sudden development of fever, intense headache, nausea and often vomiting, stiff neck and a distinctive rash. Severe cases can result in delirium and coma and, if untreated, toxic shock and death. Meningococcal disease occurs seasonally in some regions of the world. In Sub-Saharan Africa, epidemics of meningococcal disease occur between December and June. Localized outbreaks have been reported in parts of Brazil, India and Nepal. Short-term travellers staying in city hotels with high standards and little contact with the local population are at minimal risk and should not need to be vaccinated for travel in Asia, Africa or Latin America.
- **Rabies** is an acute viral infection, causing inflammation of the brain and spinal cord which is invariably fatal. Rabies occurs in many areas of the world. Travellers planning extended visits to countries where rabies control programs for domestic animals are inadequate, or who are planning to live in areas where rabies is widespread should consider pre-exposure immunization with rabies vaccine. A post-exposure vaccine exists for use following a bite by a rabid animal; however, it may not be easily available in all countries. Regardless of whether pre-exposure immunization has been given, any traveller bitten by a rabid animal should be given the post-exposure vaccine immediately.
- **Typhoid fever** is caused by a bacterial infection. Its symptoms include a sustained fever, headache, malaise, loss of appetite, slowed heartbeat, enlarged spleen and rose spots developing on the trunk of the body. Typhoid is typically spread through water which has not been adequately treated to remove or kill the bacteria. Typhoid vaccine is recommended for any traveller who will have prolonged exposure to potentially contaminated water and food. Most urban tourist destinations provide water which is adequately treated; however, if you plan to travel in smaller cities and villages in developing countries, or rural areas off the usual tourist routes, you may need to be vaccinated against typhoid before you travel.
- **Yellow fever** is a viral disease spread by mosquito bite. The symptoms include the sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, generalized muscle pain, severe fatigue, nausea and vomiting. International Health Regulations, established by the World Health

Organization, require that travellers to regions where yellow fever is found be vaccinated against yellow fever and given an International Certificate of Vaccination. A valid certificate issued within the past 10 years is required for entry into 21 countries in Central Africa and South America. In addition, 102 other countries require proof of vaccination from travellers who have passed through (non-direct flights) an area where yellow fever occurs. Travellers without proper vaccination and certificate can be seriously delayed, depending on the route and destination. Both the vaccine and certificate are *only* available at certain travel medicine clinics recognized by the Public Health Agency of Canada as yellow fever clinics.<sup>6</sup>



So now that you have gotten all of your shots you are ready and raring to go right? Wrong, sorry but you can still get sick during your trip and end up having to cancel it. That means all of your money and effort has gone right down the drain. What can you do?

1. Keep your medicine with you. When flying, keep medicines in your carry-on bags.

2. Move around. Get up and walk around the train, plane, boat, etc., one time per hour for a few minutes or longer. If driving, get out of the car and move around for five or more minutes. Sitting for long periods of time can hinder your digestion, circulation and flexibility and cause your feet to swell.
3. Support your back. Ask the hotel for a king-size bed because they are usually firmer and in better condition. Adjust seats while travelling to maintain proper back and head support.
4. Eat right and drink water. To reduce the risk of developing indigestion, eat new foods in moderation during active times of the day, not at night. When travelling by air, minimize your intake of alcoholic and caffeinated beverages; both can dehydrate you.
5. Plan ahead. If you suffer from motion sickness, avoid heavy meals and alcohol before travelling.
6. Avoid muscle strain. Pack two smaller suitcases rather than a single large one. Also, buy suitcases on wheels that have pull handles or straps.
7. Be prepared. When you travel to areas where you are a visitor, carry a written summary of your personal health history, your immunization history, a list of your current medications by brand and generic name, a list of any of the medical problems

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

from which you suffer, a list of any drugs of which you are allergic, your physician's name and telephone number and the name and phone number of a relative or friend to contact in case of a medical emergency.

8. Don't let jet lag get you down. Try to diminish the effects of jet lag by shifting your sleep/wake cycle to the new time in advance of travel, making appropriate food choices and spending time outdoors during your first few days after arrival.<sup>7</sup>

## FOOD

Food can be one of the hardest areas to deal with when travelling especially to a foreign country. One of the best parts about travelling to a different country is trying the cuisine right? Well, unfortunately, sometimes that experience can really 'bite,' especially if you end up violently ill.



<sup>7</sup> Baptist Leader. "10 Steps to Healthy Travelling." Road & Travel Magazine. C.2005.

< <http://www.roadandtravel.com/health/10stepstohalthtraveling.htm> > (2005-04-04).

If you are travelling *anywhere* outside of North America (Canada and United States) **never** eat raw foods, including salads, uncooked vegetables, unpasteurized milk products or fruit that you have not washed or peeled yourself. Keep this simple rule in mind: "Boil it, peel it, cook it or forget it."<sup>8</sup> We have all heard about Montezuma's Revenge – also known as traveller's diarrhoea. We all have heard the advice 'never drink the tap water or even the ice cubes' in places like Mexico but did you know that swimming can also put you at risk for this particular 'fun' experience? When you travel, especially in the tropics, only use chlorinated pools and beaches that have been scientifically certified as unpolluted.

Even on the beach you should wear aquatic shoes that will protect your feet from contact with some highly unpleasant surprises – both bacterial and animal. The last thing you want on your vacation is to make friends with a poisonous jelly fish! When you are travelling remember to drink only beverages that are canned or bottled in a recognized commercial operation, avoid water with questionable quality, never drink the tap water, and always protect your skin since it is the only one you will ever have.

<sup>8</sup> Bornstein, Dr. Peter F. "Health Travel Tips for Spring Break Vacationers and Others Heading to the Beach." PRNewswire. Minnesota: March 15<sup>th</sup> 2005.

< [http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content5/spring\\_break\\_tips.html](http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content5/spring_break_tips.html) > (2005-04-04).